

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Urges Passage of Asia, Western Hemisphere Trade Deals

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama is calling on Congress to swiftly approve pending free-trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia and Panama, deals he says will enhance economic development in the United States and around the world.

“The series of trade agreements I am submitting to Congress today will make it easier for American companies to sell their products in South Korea, Colombia and Panama and provide a major boost to our exports,” Obama said October 3.

He said in a statement the deals will support “tens of thousands of jobs” across the United States, and he called on Congress to pass the agreements without delay.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the deals demonstrate the Obama administration’s commitment to strengthening U.S. economic leadership around the world.

“They are critical to building open, free, transparent and fair economic platforms in the Asia-Pacific and South America,” Clinton said in an October 3 statement. She said the agreement’s stakes are not just economic, as the three countries are “important partners in strategically vital regions.”

She said passing the deals would show countries around the world that the United States can deliver for its friends and allies, and would advance U.S. leadership around the world.

U.S. officials emphasized the deals will benefit the governments, businesses and civilians of the three trade partners by securing increased investments in their goods and services, giving them preferential access to the world’s largest consumer market and a tariff edge over global competitors. U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk called for swift passage of the deals, which he said “advance a balanced trade agenda that opens new markets” for U.S. exporters while providing new opportunities for American workers.

Acting U.S. Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank said the deals would play a significant role in helping to meet President Obama’s goal of doubling U.S. exports by the end of 2014. She said exports are leading the country’s economic recovery, supporting nearly 10 million American jobs and accounting for more than 13 percent of U.S. economic output in the first quarter of 2011. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said October 3 that

passing the deals would mean an additional \$2.3 billion in agricultural exports alone, supporting nearly 20,000 U.S. jobs.

Blank said the agreements “will no doubt further strengthen our economy and create jobs, and they deserve expeditious approval.”

White House officials say the agreements would allow the United States to cooperate with three diverse economies, each contributing to the U.S. economy in a unique way. In addition to a potential 70,000 additional U.S. jobs created by the deal with South Korea, the Colombia agreement is expected to boost the U.S. gross domestic product, while Panama offers the potential for major infrastructure projects, as well as a significant market for U.S. exports and service providers.

The agreements, negotiated by the George W. Bush administration more than four years ago, have been delayed, largely because of political gridlock between the U.S. executive branch, which negotiates the deals, and the legislators who approve them. The legislation for the pacts will be considered under fast-track rules intended to require Congress to vote within 90 legislative days, limiting debate and amendments before an up-or-down vote.

Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner said in an October 3 statement that the trade deals “will be a top priority for the House.” He said representatives will quickly begin the process of considering the bills and expressed hope that the deals will be passed soon. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said the same day he expects the Senate will act on the bills before the end of October.

Secretary Clinton to African Women: “We Have Faith in You”

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer

Washington — “We have faith in you, and we have faith in Africa, but we think Africa will grow more sustainably if women are full partners in that growth,” U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told a group of women entrepreneurs from 36 African nations at a luncheon in their honor October 3.

The luncheon was a highlight of the second African Women’s Entrepreneurship Exchange Program (AWEP), which brought 40 business owners to the United States for three weeks of professional development training and the opportunity to interact with American business executives and policymakers.

“If women are empowered to work, to build businesses, to have access to credit, to have an ownership interest in the land that they farm and the crops that they harvest, to

be given a chance to compete, we know that women will make a huge contribution,” Clinton said.

She noted that AWEP was launched just a year ago but is already showing results. A 2010 participant from Liberia raised seed money to establish a business incubator that is helping more than 300 Liberian women start businesses. A woman from Senegal brought agribusiness leaders to Washington to learn about public-private partnerships. A business leader from Tanzania set up a network of 1,000 Tanzanian women business owners and negotiated with Macy’s department stores to sell her textile designs and fabrics.

The Obama administration, Clinton said, is committed to creating entrepreneurship opportunities for women, who “hold the key to economic growth in Africa, just as they hold the key to economic growth around the world.”

She encouraged nations to change the laws that prevent women from realizing their full economic potential. And she told the AWEP participants, “You have to be engaged in helping us know how best to help you, because, at the end of the day, we want you to succeed and we know your success will breed many more successes.”

“There will be young men and women who will have a better future because of what you do — because of the jobs you create, the businesses you start, the growth you inspire, and the results that will benefit the entire world,” she said.

AWEP seeks to provide African small business owners with the tools to export to the United States under the terms of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and to establish or expand business relationships with U.S. partners.

The women entrepreneurs in this year’s program have traveled around the country under the sponsorship of the State Department to meet U.S. officials, business representatives and civil society groups. In Washington, they are slated to attend the Small Business Partnerships Program at the U.S.-Africa Business Summit, sponsored by the Corporate Council on Africa and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

U.S. Announces Grants to Combat Exploitative Child Labor

Washington — U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis released three new reports on child labor and forced labor October 3 and announced \$32.5 million in grants to combat child labor around the world.

“These reports provide an overview of international efforts to protect children from hazardous work and

identify critical gaps in policy and enforcement that leave them vulnerable,” Solis said. “Through increased education and awareness, and critical assistance to families and governments, we can help make exploitative child labor a thing of the past.”

The “Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor” report (PDF, 11MB), mandated by the Trade and Development Act, contains more than 140 country profiles, focusing on hazardous work performed by children. The report includes major findings on each central government’s efforts to address the worst forms of child labor; gaps in legislation, enforcement, policies and programs; and proposed actions for each government to consider in addressing those gaps. It also provides details about the accessibility and cost of education, which is not compulsory everywhere, by country.

The updated “List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor,” (PDF, 8.3MB) mandated by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, expands the number of goods by two, for a total of 130, and adds one country where they are produced, for a total of 71.

The list of goods and products produced by forced or indentured child labor (XLS, 93KB) required by Executive Order 13126 has also been updated.

To address the challenges of combating child labor and to highlight new initiatives, Solis hosted a panel discussion October 3. Participants included Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa; Ambassador Jose L. Cuisia Jr. of the Philippines; Constance Thomas, director of the International Labour Organization’s International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor; and Daphne Culanag, project director of World Vision in the Philippines.

The three reports were developed by the Labor Department’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs based on data collected from U.S. embassies, foreign governments, international and nongovernmental organizations, field research projects, academic research and media reports.

The new grants are:

- \$15 million awarded to the International Labour Organization in Geneva to provide assistance to targeted countries in order to promote sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable populations; support innovative research and monitoring systems to aid policy development and program design; and encourage new efforts to protect children from exploitation in domestic work.
- \$15 million awarded to World Vision in the Philippines to address the worst forms of child labor in sugarcane production.
- \$2.5 million awarded to the International Labour

Organization to support the Labor Department's programming and implementation of impact evaluations to identify best practices for addressing child labor.

In recognition of the impact of the global economic crisis on vulnerable children, the international community met at The Hague in 2010 to renew its commitment to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by 2016. Delegates agreed to a road map for meeting that deadline and called on world leaders to implement it.

More than 215 million children are engaged in child labor, the International Labour Organization estimates, with more than half performing hazardous work. The ILO also has found that a growing number of 15- to 17-year-olds are engaging in work that is hazardous to their health, safety and morals.

U.S. Delegation on Food Security Travels to Horn of Africa

Washington — A U.S. delegation will visit Ethiopia and Kenya October 4-5 to discuss key agricultural and food security issues, and to show the United States' continuing commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to Africans hit hardest by the famine in the Horn of Africa, the State Department said October 4.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has asked Dr. Raj Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), to lead the delegation.

At the United Nations on September 23, Clinton announced an additional contribution of \$42 million in humanitarian assistance for the Horn of Africa, which includes \$30 million for efforts in Somalia.

"The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to the region, now providing approximately \$650 million in life-saving assistance to help nearly 4.6 million people in need," the State Department said.

The delegation includes Ambassador Ertharin Cousin, the U.S. representative to the United Nations food and agriculture agencies, and Acting Special Representative for Global Food Security Jonathan Shrier.

"They will meet with government officials and civil society and private sector representatives to discuss progress in the region and impediments to securing unfettered humanitarian access to the at-risk populations in Somalia and those in camps in Kenya and Ethiopia," the department said in a prepared statement. "Since emergency assistance alone cannot solve the underlying long-term problems, the delegation will also visit programs that demonstrate how *Feed the Future* projects

are supporting local efforts to increase resilience among vulnerable populations."

In Brief: "Banned Books Week" Highlights Freedom of Speech

During the last week of September, the American Library Association (ALA) and a number of organizations bringing together teachers, booksellers and publishers sponsor Banned Books Week to celebrate "the freedom to read and the importance of the First Amendment."

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees that no law shall be created "abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." The sponsoring groups collect reports of efforts to suppress reading materials and use Banned Books Week to highlight the importance of open and free access to information. Many books now considered literary classics — such as John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy — have been targets of campaigns to remove them from libraries and school reading lists.

Pat Scales, chair of the ALA's Intellectual Freedom Committee, said that attempts to suppress a book are most often made by an individual or a small group and are made because of objections to a book being taught in a school or circulated in a public library. "People think, 'What's one book?'" said Scales. "Well, one book is someone's freedom."

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